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SUBJECT: JMST SHIFTS FOCUS TO TRIPOLI GROUP, CIVIL SOCIETY

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B) KHARTOUM 372

¶11. (SBU) Summary: With peace talks in Doha suspended due to the impasse between the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Government of Sudan (GOS), the UN/AU Joint Mediation Support Team (JMST) is shifting its immediate focus to the so-called "Tripoli Group" of rebel factions. JMST is also reaching out to Darfur civil society groups, according to George Zachariah, Special Assistant to Joint Chief Mediator Djibril Bassol. Bassol plans to continue his approach of establishing parallel tracks with JEM, the Tripoli Group, Abdul Wahid and other constituencies, emphasizing flexibility and pursuit of progress rather than any particular sequential approach. "At the end of the day, it's whatever works," said Zachariah. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) In Zachariah's view, the Doha talks broke down because "JEM simply didn't want to move." They were clearly not ready to discuss a cessation of hostilities, he said, though their motives remain unclear. Perhaps Chadian President Idriss Deby will not allow them, Zachariah speculated, or they believe they can gain additional military victories in coming weeks. Regardless, the JMST believes that JEM cannot afford to let go of the Doha process, which has given it prominence and put it in the good graces of the international community. In the meantime, the JMST plans to broaden the scope of the Doha process by reaching out to other rebels and civil society.

¶13. (SBU) In the coming weeks, the JMST plans to travel to Libya to meet with the so-called "Tripoli Group" (Ref B). The JMST has made little headway with SLA/Unity's Abdallah Yehia and the other marginal factions since the signing of the Tripoli Agreement on March 15, but Bassol hopes to bring them to Doha to establish a parallel track to discussions with JEM. While the military strength of the Tripoli Group is highly suspect, and its popular support questionable, Zachariah stated that it nonetheless contains Darfur-based movements, while the Chad-based JEM does not. In addition, with JEM licking its wounds in Chad (Ref A), he maintained that bringing the Tripoli Group to Doha means that the remaining insecurity in Darfur, most notably banditry, falls under the purview of the GOS.

¶14. (SBU) With regard to SLA/Abdul Wahid, Zachariah reported that the JMST will continue to make overtures to the recalcitrant leader despite being stood up several times by him in Paris. It does not, however, plan any outreach to his commanders, many of whom have shown a greater willingness to negotiate than does their Chairman. "That's not a road we're going to go down," said Zachariah, recalling Ahmed Abdulshafie's failed attempt to bypass Abdul Wahid's leadership of the Fur. "It's something that's been tried in the past, and failed." The JMST nonetheless recognizes the need to include the Fur (Darfur's largest ethnic group) in the Doha process through civil society, he said, and would like to invite such groups

to Doha for consultations. The JMST has not yet come up with a strategy for such outreach, he added, noting that input from the USG on how best to do this would be most welcome.

¶15. (SBU) With regard to SLA/Minni Minnawi, the JMST has not changed its view that Minnawi ought to attend the Doha talks as part of the GOS (versus an independent status.) Zachariah noted that the JMST's mandate is to deal with the non-signatories of the DPA, not to revise or compromise that document. Minnawi himself has also been sending mixed messages, alternately expressing frustration and satisfaction with his relationship with the GOS. As for the GOS, Zachariah noted that in his view its behavior in Doha was "impeccable." Unlike JEM, he said the GOS was constructive, responsive to requests and "generally played the game well." As usual, however, whether the GOS intends to fully implement agreements or take forward-looking action on Darfur remains in question. If the GOS does make commitments and follows through, Zachariah thought that "progress on the ground is possible."

¶16. (SBU) Zachariah also emphasized the need to "harmonize" the Darfur peace process with the upcoming 2010 elections, and urged the USG to pressure the NCP and especially the SPLM in this regard. He expressed disappointment with JEM, which for all its military might has yet to make an impact in the political arena. Though security on the ground is an important prerequisite and the timeline to elections is shrinking, "it is too soon to write them off," he asserted.

¶17. (SBU) In conclusion, Zacharia remarked that the JMST was ultimately focused on remaining flexible and open-minded toward achieving a breakthrough in the mediation process. In contrast with the previous AU mediators Salim and Eliasson, who made public

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pronouncements of their strategies only to watch them fail, Bassole is focused on adapting to changing dynamics and pressures, a style Zachariah characterized as "diplomatic judo." Bassol will remain flexible in his approach because "at the end of the day, it's about whatever works," said Zachariah.

¶18. (SBU) Comment: While the JMST characterizes its approach as flexible, reactive might be a more apt description. Before the Government of Qatar's desire to flex its newfound diplomatic muscle, the JMST appeared rudderless; the success of getting JEM to Doha had more to do with JEM's desire for exclusivity in peace talks - and intensive efforts by Special Envoy Gration - than any particular effort of the JMST. The Tripoli Group, meanwhile, was hatched by Libya and Qatar. Bassol has certainly proven himself adept at leveraging the actions of others and demonstrating he is a competent behind-the-scenes-negotiator. But he has also shown remarkably little initiative in advancing the peace process on his own accord. With the rebel movements in shambles, no formal outreach has been made to civil society groups. This is true despite the JMST's lip service to engaging this critical constituency and its also having a knowledgeable senior advisor on the subject. Despite the failure of last year's GOS-sponsored Sudan People's Initiative (which included civil society representatives) to produce any results, ultimately a solution for Darfur could be a package of internationally-brokered and monitored concessions by the GOS in areas such as compensation for IDPs, land rights, development, and political participation for Darfuris. Apart from Abdel Wahid al Nur, who appears at this point to be more of a symbolic figure for the Fur than an actual leader, other rebel groups have no broad, popular constituencies. For this reason, government concessions linked to talks with respected civil society leaders may represent an alternative path forward while efforts to broker a ceasefire continue.

ASQUINO